

Zika complications may go beyond microcephaly, researchers fear

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Top Zika investigators now believe that the birth defect microcephaly and the paralyzing Guillain-Barre syndrome may be just the most obvious maladies caused by the mosquito-borne virus.

Fueling that suspicion are recent discoveries of serious brain and spinal cord infections – including encephalitis, meningitis and myelitis – in people exposed to Zika.

Evidence that Zika's damage may be more varied and widespread than initially believed adds pressure on affected countries to control mosquitoes and prepare to provide intensive – and, in some cases, lifelong – care to more patients. The newly suspected disorders can cause paralysis and permanent disability – a clinical outlook that adds urgency to vaccine development efforts.

Scientists are of two minds about why these new maladies have come into view. The first is that, as the virus is spreading through such large populations, it is revealing aspects of Zika that went unnoticed in earlier outbreaks in remote and sparsely populated areas. The second is that the newly detected disorders are more evidence that the virus has evolved.

The suspicion that Zika acts directly on nerve cells began with autopsies on aborted and stillborn fetuses showing the virus replicating in brain tissues. In addition to microcephaly, researchers reported finding other abnormalities linked with Zika including fetal deaths, placental insufficiency, fetal growth retardation and injury to the central nervous system.

Doctors also are worried that Zika exposure in utero may have hidden effects, such as behavioral problems or learning disabilities, that are not apparent at birth.

Read full, original post: [Zika mystery deepens with evidence of nerve cell infections](#)